U.B.C. Planning Papers

School of Community and Regional Planning

University of British Columbia
Vancouver, British Columbia

ISSN: 0828-2412

Global Cities and Public Policy
The Case of Vancouver, British Columbia

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CS #17
June 1988

UBC PLANNING PAPERS
Comparative Urban & Regional Studies #17

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Abstract

In the context of growing economic interrelationships between nations a set of 'global' cities is emerging. These cities are evolving as the principal nodes in the international economic network. The initial objective of this paper is to identify the primary distinguishing characteristics of these cities. In light of these attributes, and using Vancouver, B.C. as an illustrative case study, attention is then directed to the formulation of policies designed to promote a particular metropolitan area within the global network.

Global Cities and Public Policy: The Case of Vancouver, British Columbia

Introduction

Globalization is no longer an academic concept or one confined to specific sectors such as banking and finance. Long past are the days when nations could make domestic economic policy independent of the global marketplace. This is also true for many firms, particularly those in financial services for which the globalization and integration of world markets proceeds at a sometimes worrying pace [1;16;21;41]. As a result of this integration there is a growing network of "international financial centres" (IFCs) within which the world's financial decisions are being increasingly concentrated. The evolution of these IFCs in turn provides vital clues for our present inquiry concerning the growing broad-based integration of the world's major cities into a truly global city network.[1]

At the more micro level, the presence of multinational enterprises and international financial firms within the cores of cities provide local evidence of the globalization of economic activity [5;31]. The pioneering integration of global financial capital flows will not readily be separated from other flows of international investment even in areas long thought to be insulated, such as urban property markets [3;4;12;29]. In the

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[1]For a discussion of the factors which influence the development of of IFCs, see [13;14;23;34].

present context this suggests that urban economies and the urban development process will be increasingly affected nationally by international capital flows through growing global economic links, and more locally through direct investment in urban development by offshore interests.

Accordingly, there is an important potential role for all levels of government to guide cities as they become part of the global urban network. Specifically, cities will need to identify more precisely the demands placed on them by entry into the global city network. The formulation, coordination and implementation of policy will also be essential to assist cities to develop the necessary preconditions for global city status. Basically, city regions will have to compete globally to survive and prosper just as private sector firms (particularly those in financial services) have had to learn to do over the past decade.

The present paper seeks to add to our understanding of what it is going to take to become a global city in the future by first identifying the primary characteristics of global cities. In light of these characteristics specific public policies to assist individual cities in achieving global city status are suggested, using Vancouver, British Columbia as an illustrative case.

The Concept of a Global City

In an effort to distinguish the principal characteristics of global cities, two interrelated bodies of literature were reviewed. First is the "world" or global city literature which basically takes a supply-side view, focussing on the attributes of such cities. Complementing this view is the location literature which essentially has a demand side perspective with a focus on the location criteria used by firms as they seek global office locations.

The principal findings of the location and IFC work can be grouped into five major points. First, political stability is a very important criterion when viewing office location in a multinational context [7;11;17;18]. While frequently taken for granted in North America, in an international context it is important and should be recognized explicitly.

A second criterion of importance is access, particularly access by air [2;7;17]. Given the need for face-to-face communication in office work, this requirement is not surprising. However, access to an international airport is only part of the issue, the other is the density of international connections to and from the airport. Complementary to air access is state-of-the-art telecommunications, which is seen in the location literature as an indispensible element [2;7;11]. This is particularly true for financial firms seeking a potential international financial centre location [24].

A third characteristic that emerges from the literature is that of the so-called 'advanced' or 'producer' services--the professional services (legal, accounting, engineering, management consulting, etc.), finance, insurance and real estate--that are growing in importance. Not only are service activities expanding very rapidly, but they are also relatively free of the trade barriers that exist in the "goods" markets.

> Service economies seem to find each other the least protective of their respective service sectors and thus more open to foreign penetration. Furthermore, since service economies are the major consumers of services, in both absolute and relative terms, they themselves actually provide the largest potential market for each other's exports of services. [37:6]

The service sector must be treated as a key element in any strategy to develop an internationally competitive urban economy [9;10;15;20;37]. Given the growing role played by producer services, especially in job creation in advanced economies, these services need to be emphasized in urban and regional economic strategies.

> The rate and breadth of change is accelerating in the 1980s, however, and the form of investment, removing or creating jobs, is becoming more varied. In particular,... the variety of activities encompassed by producer services is of growing significance....Public policy, including patterns of new infrastructure investment, will be under strong pressure to follow where these trends lead. [42:45]

A fourth characteristic of global cities is high quality "infrastructure" by which is meant the whole host of public and private sector support services available in the city. Global cities will be those that provide the infrastructure necessary to attract international firms. "The city of tomorrow will be the

global city of today--the city that has set its course on attracting multinational corporate tenants." [17:79]. In this vein post-secondary educational and health facilities are particularly important. Private sector support services such as legal, accounting, marketing and financing are also vital. Finally, access to government support services and government decisionmakers is also frequently stressed [7;24].

An increasingly important component of infrastructure is the broadly defined "quality of the living environment" [2;7;17], including the "international attitude" of indigenous residents [7;17;24], as well as the more traditional environmental attributes such as open space; air and water quality; diverse and affordable housing; and good transportation.

Finally, from the literature it is arguable that a fifth characteristic of global cities is their willingness to take charge of the development and shaping of their individual economic destinies and to become truly "proactive" [17;18;19]. This is particularly the case in gaining access to the global city network. Cities desiring to attain global status will need to draw upon a broad base of community support to achieve a coordinated approach to becoming a global city [17] and construct plans in which the micro details of a city's strengths and weaknesses are carefully considered [25].

> The extent to which any human settlement becomes global in scope depends, in large part, on its citizenry. This globalization occurs only when the permanent residents of the community are convinced that attracting regional offices and corporate headquarters is essential for the city's future survival and growth...Hence, the commitment to build a global

city requires full community endorsement--from the private and public sectors, labor unions, even religious and education institutions. [18:117-118]

An Assessment of the Locational Attributes of Vancouver, B.C.

Applying the foregoing discussion to the case of Vancouver allows us to begin to specify a policy role for government, which is the goal of the present section.

Political stability. The general political stability of Canada and thus of Vancouver is an asset of considerable importance. There is one negative element, however, that needs to be addressed: labour unrest in recent years and the resulting increased costs and uncertainty for firms doing business in British Columbia. There are some indications that the situation is improving, but it remains a concern among many who might consider investing in the province, especially those from Southeast Asia where trade unions are much weaker.

Accessibility. Vancouver's location on the "Great Circle Route" to Asia places the city strategically on all major air and sea routes from North America to Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Taiwan Shanghai and Singapore. This strategic location means that the city is well situated to become a major hub for travel between Asia and North America. The location in the Pacific time zone also allows a normal working day to comfortably bridge working hours in London, New York and Asia which is particularly important in financial transactions, but of use in producer

services in general [13;14;24].

With respect to accessibility by water, the Port of Vancouver is Canada's largest port, consisting of an inner harbour which handles primarily general cargo and passenger vessels, and Roberts Bank, a major bulk facility. The port operates year-round and uses modern electronic nautical navigation systems. Within the past five years, the Port's export tonnage has increased 19% and its import tonnage by 34%.

While the Vancouver region's location on the Pacific Rim is an advantage for Asia Pacific opportunities, it is a marked disadvantage for access to the rest of North America, particularly the political and economic centres of central Canada and the eastern United States. Offsetting this disadvantage to a considerable degree, however, have been developments in the field of telecommunications, a critical factor in the interregional and international competition for the advanced or quaternary service and managerial activities [33]. At present the region is extremely well served on a world standard with state-of-the-art telecommunications.

Advanced services. In a recent study, Davis and Goldberg [6] undertook to establish the economic comparative advantages of the Vancouver CMA relative to the two other major Canadian cities (Toronto and Montreal) and the primary U.S. west coast metropolitan ports (Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego). Based on a comparison of sector location quotients and growth rates, their analysis reveals Vancouver's

estimated comparative advantages to be overwhelmingly established in the service sectors. In particular, the city has developed significant advantages in transportation and communication activities, a phenomenon likely attributable in large part to the city's strategic location on the Pacific Rim. The city's estimated advantages extend as well into the activities of wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance and real estate.

Looking at the possible emergence of new sectors of comparative advantage for the Vancouver economy in the future, the authors singled out services to business management. Service activities in general have indeed accounted for the major share of employment growth in the Vancouver economy over the recent past, and much of that increment results from the expansion of the interwoven complex of corporate and public sector services.

> The head office complex in downtown Vancouver, a strong public sector presence and a regional population of 2.9 million people have encouraged the rise of a vigorous producer service sector. A range of indicators point to its rapid growth in Vancouver's core: the city issued licenses to 1,800 firms with downtown addresses classified as engaged in business and professional services in 1971, and to 3,500 such firms in 1980...there was also a four-fold increase of employees working in the business service field in the metropolitan area from 1961 to 1982. Finally, there was a three-fold increase in the number of firms listed in the telephone directory for a range of producer services between 1960 and 1983. [26:419]

In sum, metropolitan Vancouver appears to be establishing a strong base for an international presence in advanced or producer services.

Infrastructure. The city's location on the Pacific Rim has led to the development of long-term, broad commercial and trading

ties with the Asia Pacific region, especially Japan, Korea and, increasingly, Hong Kong. These ties provide significant opportunities for building future relations and have been closely associated with more than a century of cultural links resulting from ethnic Chinese immigration. This immigration has continued apace, becoming particularly rapid and visible over the last two decades [22]. A community of ethnic Japanese also developed early this century and has been of considerable importance with the burgeoning trade with Japan.

Concerning the more micro issues relating to the internal and spatial structure of the Vancouver region, a number of points are worth making. First, looking at some potentially important economic sectors, the presence of state-of-the-art medical and health facilities provide significant potential for future exploitation in promoting Vancouver as an international city [8]. Similarly, the existence of excellent primary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions provides an attraction of potential importance for businesses looking for a North American Pacific Rim home, particularly for the ethnic Chinese [12]. The presence of a strong complement of producer services also suggests that the management infrastructure is in place to make Vancouver attractive for Pacific Rim oriented businesses, government agencies, and cultural/trade organizations [2;20;27;36;38]. Finally, the emergence of organizations such as the Hong Kong Canada Business Association, the Asia Pacific Foundation, and the Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei Cultural Association suggests the development in the region of a growing

outward and Asian-oriented perspective.

Added to these privately provided producer services are excellent public services, particularly those provided at the local and regional level. These services along with the moderate climate and outstanding physical setting provide a quality of life which is of growing importance as a locational factor [28;31;32].

At the most micro level, that of the urban property market, the Vancouver metropolitan area also has considerable comparative advantages. First, real estate prices and rents on a world scale are quite reasonable [30;39]. There exists a wide variety of housing types at prices well below those in most of the cities of the Asia Pacific region. Office space is also plentiful and again available at rates that are half those in U.S. Pacific cities, a tenth of those in Tokyo and a quarter of those in Hong Kong.

Lastly, the Vancouver metropolitan region possesses a compact urban form, minimal traffic congestion and good public transit, allowing for efficient operation of office-based activities. Additionally, there exist large assembled urban sites and several centrally-located older industrial land parcels all of which allow for future long-term growth in close proximity to the existing core.

If there is a significant weakness in the region's infrastructure, it is likely the general absence of scale and

agglomeration economies in the region's headquarters and banking activities. Recently passed federal "international banking centre" legislation may help here, as may companion provincial legislation designed to promote Vancouver as an international financial centre [35]. For the time being, however, agglomeration economies are limited when compared with those of the larger cities in the Asia Pacific basin.

Proactive local government. The City of Vancouver has been particularly active during the 1980s in identifying elements in its economic future. It has developed a broad-ranging, widely circulated, and much discussed Economic Strategy [40]. It has sponsored half a dozen trade missions to Asia. It has embarked on an ambitious sister-city programme, developing ties and joint initiatives with Guangchow in the People's Republic of China and with Los Angeles on the U.S. West Coast. In both instances the choice was motivated by a desire to forge operational links with key Pacific Rim cities. For example, Vancouver and Los Angeles are developing joint tourist promotion efforts to bring offshore tourists to North America and then to both Vancouver and L.A.

The City has also been a very strong supporter of the federal-provincial Asia Pacific Initiative, of the International Financial Centre legislation, and of the expansion and devolution to independent self-sustaining status for both the Port of Vancouver and the Vancouver International Airport. Moreover, the City of Vancouver has worked to highlight cultural ties with Asia such as its co-sponsorship of the Sun-Yat Sen Chinese Classical

Garden and of the Asia-Pacific Festival.

Areas of weakness relate to the City's growing isolation within the provincial government's framework of regional economic development and the City's growing inability to undertake land-use, transportation, and economic planning, making it more difficult to develop metropolitan-wide initiatives and internationally-oriented programmes. Intermittent political problems between the city and the province round out the list of barriers to more effective and coordinated proactive efforts by the city and other local governments in the Greater Vancouver region.

Policy Proposals for Promoting Vancouver to Global City Status

To summarize to this point, we have identified what we believe to be the principal characteristics of global cities and we have assessed metropolitan Vancouver in light of these attributes. The objective of this section is to construct a set of policy proposals designed to attract to Vancouver internationally oriented firms and organizations. These proposals are based largely on a supply-side perspective, i.e. they are designed to enhance Vancouver's attractiveness for internationally oriented firms and organizations, particularly those with a Pacific Rim focus that can build upon the Great Circle Route location and past commercial and cultural links.

Political stability. While political stability in the global sense is of the highest level in Canada, any measures

undertaken to reduce the province's (and thus Vancouver's) reputation for labour unrest and 'confrontational' politics in general would well serve the metropolitan region.

Accessibility. Improved accessibility calls for expansion and active promotion of the Vancouver International Airport. In virtually all of the literature reviewed earlier, airport access was seen as critical. Access was viewed in two ways: the ease with which people could travel to and use the airport; and the access to the rest of the world provided by the airport. Accordingly, the airport must expand its facilities so that they are of the highest quality. Airport operating procedures and the conclusion of additional bi-lateral landing rights across the Pacific are also needed so that VIA can become a major hub for North American-Pacific Rim travel.

A complementary policy for improving accessibility might involve an attempt to diminish psychological distances between Vancouver and other "global" cities through the enhancement of intercity contacts. Such activities as sister city programs with Los Angeles, Yokohama and Guangdong are potentially significant building blocks. A program of trade missions and perhaps joint trade fairs (with Los Angeles for example) and other joint activities (like tourist promotion packages) would promote further ties and develop on-going working relationships.

Advanced services. As part of any forward looking economic development strategy, policies are required which will recognize and build on the centrality of services as key elements in

Vancouver's present and likely future comparative advantage. Specifically, financial and producer services would seem to be particularly important. Also of importance is the recognition of Vancouver as a goods transshipment point. Policies are needed which modernize and increase the competitiveness of the sea port and its operating procedures and which serve reduce the cost of commodity shipments to the rest of North America.

Another policy thrust with respect to the Vancouver service complex would be to promote Vancouver as an "International Financial Centre" (IFC), as is being done with recent federal and provincial legislation. Although initial employment creation is likely to be modest, the financial functions that the IFC could generate would greatly enhance Vancouver's ability to attract and retain the sorts of foreign institutions needed to make Vancouver an international city. Development of Vancouver as an IFC would also endow the region with new technology and enhance its general reputation as an international city. Cooperation between the federal and provincial governments under the "Asia Pacific Initiative" is particularly encouraging in this vein.

Infrastructure. A key approach to improved infrastructure is the enhancement of support for and visibility of post-secondary educational institutions. Policies are needed to support and actively promote and market a thriving research and educational community consisting of the major universities, technical and business institutions. Expanding access is also important as the presence of a high quality labour force is a

central locational concern for international service firms. The excellence of the educational and research community also adds to the general visibility, quality of life, and attractiveness of the City to national and international firms and agencies.

Policy should also be developed to maintain and enhance the region's outstanding "livability" characteristics. The natural setting, low levels of pollution and congestion, high quality public and private services, and relatively high levels of public safety are all major advantages as confirmed by the location literature. It is imperative that these livability advantages be maintained and where appropriate intensified through improving environmental protection activities, maintaining parks and open space, and improving urban design to promote both density and livability. An effort should also be made to support and promote recreational and cultural amenities. These factors are mentioned frequently in the location literature and are part and parcel of the important "quality of life" location criterion.

Proactive local government. Within local government, policy should be designed to promote an outward looking global world view in Vancouver. Given the emphasis placed in the literature on global thinking, it is imperative that Vancouverites, British Columbians, and Canadians increasingly see themselves in a global context. Public policy needs to stress the opportunities provided by a global view. It also needs to demonstrate that change can be exciting as well as fear-producing. This is especially important in view of recent anti-immigration and

anti-Asian sentiments being raised in British Columbia as ties with Asian businesses grow. It is imperative that governments point out the positive aspects of such links and work to assuage the fears particularly of older and more vulnerable members of our society. Programs such as those in B.C. public schools dealing with Japanese and Chinese language and culture are excellent examples of the leadership government can provide. Appropriate federal immigration policy also needs to be in place to enable off-shore management to move to Vancouver as new branch offices are developed there.

Policy should also be formulated to develop broadly based community institutions to promote Vancouver as an international city from the inside. Much of the foregoing orientation is external. However, it is stressed in much of the literature that international cities need to have truly international attitudes among local citizens, business groups, organized labour and local governments. Thus, it is important that such support be developed and that a broad community information program be initiated quickly to elicit the support of all the facets of Vancouver and British Columbia society.

Policy should also be developed to promote flexible urban land use controls to accommodate the changing economic and population base of an emerging international city. The link is seldom made between the operation of an urban land market and national and regional economic policy such as that being proposed here. However, it is essential that this link be made explicit

and that urban land use and development policy be consistent with and an integral part of national and regional economic development policy.

In the present instance, Vancouver's potential emergence as a truly international city implies that urban land use and development controls and policies should not only allow such an evolution, but help to promote its smooth occurrence. For example, most of the activities of concern are office based and require adequate supplies of office space now and in the future. However, urban open space and recreational land uses also need to be accommodated along with the requisite water, sewer and transportation infrastructure. Finally, needed diverse and suitable housing supplies should be built and land use controls put in place that encourage housing innovation.

Summary and Conclusions

An international economic network continues to evolve in which the principal nodes are a set of metropolitan areas that are here designated as global cities. These cities will be the major actors in the world or global economy. An attempt was made to identify the primary characteristics of these cities and to assess them by use of our illustrative case study, the evolution of Vancouver as a global city. A set of policies was then formulated specifically to promote Vancouver to global city status.

It is the argument here that the development of an economic strategy for a major metropolitan area such as Vancouver should explicitly recognize the process of economic globalization. An assessment should be made of the area's potential role in that process and policies then formulated to secure and promote that role. In the policy-making and implementation processes all levels of government need to be involved.

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